

THE
ANTI-MATERIALIST, A
MANUAL FOR YOUTH
IN THREE LETTERS (1831)



RICHARD WARNER

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THE
Anti-Materialist;

A

MANUAL FOR YOUTH:

IN THREE LETTERS.

ON THE MORAL SENSE — A SLIGHT THEORY :

ON THE DECAY AND LOSS OF THE INTELLECT :

ON THE IDOLATRY OF TALENT.

BY THE

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AND AUTHOR OF

“ LITERARY RECOLLECTIONS : ” “ GREAT BRITAIN’S CRISIS : ”
&c. &c.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE SECOND and THIRD of the ensuing LETTERS, are extracted, (with slight alterations) from a collection of "TRACTS and MISCELLANIES," of which I published a small impression, several years ago. As that work, however, has been long out of print: and as the subjects of these two letters, are closely connected with that of the first, I have ventured to intrude them again on the notice of the Public. The three together, may, possibly, be considered as forming an argument against MATERIALISM, not altogether un-

adapted to the comprehension of the *youthful mind*: as well as furnishing an humble **ANTIDOTE** to the spread of certain pernicious notions, becoming too prevalent among the rising generation of the present day; derived, in a great measure, from our free intercourse with *the Continent*; from which, our young travellers too seldom return, without having left behind them, somewhat of the fine *blue polish*, of their good **OLD ENGLISH PRINCIPLES**; and importing, in their stead, opinions, sentiments, and manners, by no means favourable to piety or virtue.

LETTER I.

THE MORAL SENSE: A SLIGHT THEORY.

“ For the corruptible BODY presseth down the
“ SOUL; and the EARTHLY TABERNACLE weightheth
“ down the MIND, that museth on many things.”—
Wis. ix. 15.

LETTER I.

ON THE MORAL SENSE, &c.

To G—— C——, Esq.

January 10. 1831.

My dear Sir,

THERE are few persons, I apprehend, differing so widely on certain metaphysical and theological points, and discussing them so frequently, as we do; who have maintained their respective opinions, with less acrimony, or loss of friendly feeling towards each other, than ourselves.

I do not mention this, however, as a subject of *praise* to either of us: since it is merely a matter of requisite *propriety*, in the opposite advocates of every debated question, that they carry on their discussion, in the spirit of forbearance, and cordiality — and a *duty* of no trifling obligation, imposed upon those who differ on topics in which REVELATION is concerned, to “give the reason of the Hope that is in ‘them, with meekness and fear.”

We, both, (I feel assured,) entirely agree in the conviction, that it is essential for the elicitation of TRUTH, that calmness and sobriety should ever attend its investigation. Passion and prejudice, indeed, are by no means safe allies, in speculative con-

troversy. They dim and distort the intellectual vision: and prevent the mind from distinguishing the real nature, or proper proportions, of the subject presented to its contemplation. They divert the attention from the argument, to the opponent. The understanding and the heart become alike perverted, in the progress of such a controversy. Warmth of expression is at length substituted for vigour of thought; and “the war of words” usually terminates, *not* in the conviction of either party, but, in reciprocal dislike, or mutual contempt.

That such has been, from very early times, and is in our days, the general character of all literary disputes, implicat-

ing, in any degree, and either directly or indirectly, *religious speculations*, is notorious to every one, who is at all conversant with the History of these intellectual conflicts: nor is the cause of such heat and intemperance a subject of wonder to the reflecting mind.

Of all topics, *Religion* is that which comes most “home to men’s business and bosoms.” It involves the dearest interests of the rational and accountable being. It addresses alike his hopes and fears; his reason and his passions. Hence it is, the religious principle sinks deeply into the soul: and, that particular modification of it, which has been ingrafted into the mind, in early youth, or has grown, in

riper years, out of a serious attention to the fountain of belief, the Holy Scriptures, becomes identified with all the feelings of the heart, and all the convictions of the understanding. We cherish it with such a parental fondness; and guard it with so jealous a vigilance, as render us quick to defend; fierce to resent; and eager to punish, any opposition to that favourite system, to which we have so long adhered, or so deliberately adopted.

General practice, however, can never make that *right*, which is in itself *wrong*; nor justify the indulgence and expression of those feelings, which are alike condemned by Reason and the Gospel. From the nature of the Human Mind, men must be

expected to differ in their sentiments, on all subjects, which are not cognizable by the senses; or capable of positive demonstration; and as religious Metaphysics are of this impalpable and questionable description; we may further expect, that such speculations will appear, to different understandings, in different lights; and that these opposite aspects of the question, will be advocated, and defended, by their respective adherents, with an earnestness proportioned to their presumed importance.

But, though men *will*, necessarily, and *may*, allowably, *differ* in their sentiments respecting these abstractions, it is, notwithstanding, a point of moral and religious obligation, not to *quarrel* about them: for

“ the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” They must not violate the laws of kindness, courtesy, or charity, in the progress of their discussion. They must not associate violence with reasoning; nor add abuse, to what they are pleased to consider as proof. Differ as widely as they may from their opponents, they are, still, all fellow-travellers to Immanuel’s land; and should “ see that they fall not out by “ the way.” They all proclaim themselves to have the Honour of God, and the integrity of the Christian Faith, as the final objects of their Polemics; and should, therefore, study to promote the one, and maintain the other, by endeavouring to “ keep the unity of the spirit, in the bond “ of peace.”

That *such* has been the character of our correspondence, hitherto, on theological and metaphysical subjects, I may venture to assert with the strictest regard to Truth: and, I trust, that nothing in my present letter, will be found to ruffle that “even “tenor” of temperate argument, by which we have both endeavoured, as yet, to support the reasonableness of the opinions, which we respectively profess to have adopted. It is with entire calmness, indeed, that I approach the subject of the following pages; because I consider an Enquiry into the ORIGIN and NATURE of the MORAL SENSE, as a subject of a *speculative*, rather than a *practical* nature — as a question whose determination could neither forward nor endanger salvation:

as a topic, which must always be unfathomable by the human mind; and veiled in impenetrable mystery, until we become denizens of that state, where Faith will be realized in vision, and “where we shall “know, even as we are known.”

It is, my dear sir, a tribute of perfect sincerity to your **THEORY** of the **MORAL SENSE**, when I assure you, that I consider your exposition of it, as bearing upon its universal surface, the impress of a powerful, an acute, and an enlightened mind; a serious and thoughtful disposition; a liberal and philanthropic spirit: and that, although its reasonings have not carried conviction to my understanding, they have

gratified my taste, and will, I trust, improve my heart.

Of the essence of this Theory, you give me a view, equally clear and succinct, in the following words:— “The ancients at-“ tributed moral sentiments to the Deity:“ for they were ignorant of anatomy, and“ did not deduce moral emotions, im-“ pulses, and sensations, *from circumstances*“ *conveyed through the brain; and from the*“ *brain, through the nerves, to the whole*“ *frame, making us conscious of them.*”

Now, I candidly confess, that, on the very first glance at the above *system*, my mind was startled: because, it opposes itself to all previous theories of the origin

and nature of the MORAL SENSE, or that faculty, by which we are ascertained of the difference between right and wrong ; and establishes an entirely new foundation of moral principles and actions ; by making (in your own subsequent words), “ MORALITY a branch of the SCIENCE of PHYSICS.” More deliberate reflection upon your hypothesis, added doubt to my surprize ; and led me to believe, that the following material objections may be advanced against it : —

1st, It professes to account for *effects*, from a *cause inadequate* to produce them : by attributing to brute and inert *matter* (which, necessarily, resists a change of its present state, either of rest or motion,

without the impulse and direction of some principle, different to, and foreign from itself)—it gives, I repeat, to this *matter* (whose essence, we see, is inactivity), energies and qualities, free, excursive, and uncontrollable—intellect, thought, and sentiment—and holds it up, as the sole parent, of the creations of Fancy, and the “shadowings forth” of Imagination—of all the gifts of Reason, and all the powers of Mind.

2d, *Sensations* (which you group with *moral emotions*) are, (philosophically speaking,) nothing more than impressions made upon the different bodily organs of sense—a strictly *physical* fact. Convey them how you will to the *brain* (another mass

of *matter*, a pulp, or a bundle of fibres), and from the brain through the *nerves* (an additional *material* channel), their nature cannot be altered in their progress: they cannot be converted into *ideas*, or rendered capable of exciting *emotion*, unless there be a recipient in the brain or nerves *distinct from matter* — a principle or faculty, which has the power and office of effecting such a change. Allow me to add, here, that, in *this* particular of your hypothesis (the mode of conveying sensations to the brain), it appears to me, there is but little added to the *physiological* branches of the previous Theories of mind, by Des Cartes, Locke, Newton, and Hartley; with their “animal spirits;” “nervous fluid;” “vibrations, and vibra-

"tiancles :" and that your "faculty of
"remembrance," as you term it, is merely
a modification of that power of "asso-
"ciation," which is attributed to Mind,
by some of the above philosophers ; and
more fully developed, in the writings of
the later Scottish Metaphysicians, Dugald
Stewart, Dr. Reid, &c.

3d, In the third place, my dear Sir,
your system, as it seems to my apprehen-
sion, is inconsistent with itself: or, at
least, a certain confusion in its language,
throws that appearance over it. All the
phænomena of mind, and feeling, accord-
ing to your exposition, arise out of, and
depend upon, *pure mechanical motion* :
upon the physical action of the *organs* of

Sense ; the *brain* ; and the *nerves* — while, at the same time, you repeatedly advert, to “belief and conviction,” as “instinctive “sensations:” to “the Divinity that stirs “within us:” to “consciousness,” as distinct from “impulse:” and to “curiosity, and other emotions also, of a “spiritual nature, implanted in us by our “Maker” — expressions, which, understand them how you please, all imply, and refer to, a certain principle in the complex frame and constitution of man, different from, and superior to, its *material* part.

4th, The *objections*, my dear Sir, hitherto advanced against your Theory of the origin and nature of the MORAL SENSE,

may be considered of a metaphysical description; and have, possibly, been suggested to my mind, by a misapprehension of the real meaning of your terms; or, by a secret prejudice, in favour of what I conceive to be a more satisfactory and substantial Theory. But, an objection of a different and very serious character remains to be brought forwards; which, if well-founded, would convert an ingenious and harmless speculation, into an exposition of a very distressing and dangerous system. Allow me then to say, the impression on my mind is, that your THEORY calls in question the *verity*, and impugns the *authority*, of the WORD of GOD.

“MAN” (as Hartley observes, in the

first paragraph of his noble work *) “ consists of two parts — BODY and MIND : ” a truth which he had learned, with certainty, from REVELATION alone ; and which Paul asserts, in terms philosophically precise, when he tells the Galatians, that “ the flesh ” (or the *physical* part of man) “ lusteth against the spirit ” (or *mind* in its most comprehensive sense), “ and the spirit against the flesh ; and “ these are *contrary* one to the other ” — an assertion altogether untrue, if there be no *spiritual* principle in man ; and if his MORAL SENSE entirely arise out of, and depend upon, his *bodily* conformation :

* Observations on Man: his Frame: his Duty ; and his Expectations.

the functions of his brain, and the action
of his nerves.

I peruse Locke, and Newton, and Clarke, and Hartley, with satisfaction ; because, throughout their metaphysical enquiries, they not only recognise the verity and authority of Christianity ; but, direct their labours to the establishment of its truth — to prove, how exactly the powers of the understanding are adapted to derive conviction from its evidences ; and to display the beautiful congruity, of its *genuine* doctrines and precepts, with the nature and constitution of man, as a moral, an accountable, and an immortal being ; with his state and condition in this world ; and with his intended happy destination in

a future one. But, I confess, I tremble at any metaphysical system, which does not thus harmonize, in its proofs and conclusions, with the unsophisticated WORD of GOD. I consider it as depriving me of the only “ lamp to my feet,” in treading the dark and intricate labyrinth of such abstract reasonings: and as rendering the difficulties of all mental operations, and moral phænomena, completely unintelligible, and utterly inexplicable.

Having dealt thus freely, my dear Sir, with your THEORY of the MORAL SENSE, you have certainly a clear right to call upon me, for a full exposition of my own opinions on this interesting point. I readily admit the claim; and shall devote

the remainder of the present Letter, to a statement of the notions which I entertain on the subject in question; and to a few remarks, which appear to me to be intimately connected with it.

In one word, then, I form my Theory of the origin and nature of the **MORAL SENSE**, upon the revelations which I find in the **WORD of GOD**.

To render this volume, however, what you, as a Philosopher, will justly *expect* it to be, a *rational foundation* for my conclusions,—I must have *evidence*, completely satisfactory to my mind, of its **GENUINENESS** and **AUTHENTICITY**.

Now, *these* are irresistibly pressed upon my belief, by various and solid *proofs*, of an EXTERNAL and INTERNAL character.

With respect to the GENUINENESS of the Books of the Bible; or, the *identity of their nominal and real writers*; I try the fact, by the same tests, to which Mankind, (with universal consent,) have submitted the works, of the Greek Sages and Bards; of the Roman Poets and Historians; of the Middle-age Writers; and of the Monkish Authors: and I find, that the Biblical Books have, (to say the least of them,) as irrefragable proofs to offer on behalf of *their* genuineness, as can be urged in favour of the genuineness, of the literary productions to which I have just alluded.

The AUTHENTICITY, also, of the various canonical books of the Bible: or, the *truth of the recitals which they deliver* — is an equally firm and reasonable conclusion of my understanding; soberly and legitimately derived, from the holy, virtuous, and veracious characters, of those to whom these books are attributed — from the calmness of their views and disinterestedness of their ends, which rendered it utterly unlikely, that they should be deceived themselves, or wish to deceive others — from the confirmation of many of their assertions, by contemporary authors, either inimical, or indifferent, to their persons and cause — from the testimonies of esteemed writers, living near the times of many of these inspired men — and from

the credit attached to the Biblical records, for eighteen centuries, by all the converted and civilized part of the world.

The INTERNAL EVIDENCE of the truth of the WORD OF GOD, is not to be resisted by my mind, when I seriously consider, the salutary, excellent, and divine character, of its *doctrines* and *precepts*; which appear to my reason to be equally worthy of God; and exquisitely adapted to the nature of man; his condition here, and destination hereafter — *Doctrines* (I mean its essential, unperverted doctrines) so satisfactory to my understanding; and *precepts* so irresistibly appealing to my conscience; and so admirably suited to the disorders of my heart; that I cannot

doubt, for a single moment, of their having issued from the eternal fountain, of infinite wisdom, purity, and love: of their being the actual revelations of that great God, who first called me into existence: of that benevolent Being, who intended my purification and peace in this world; and my glorification and happiness in that which is to come.*

* It has been considered as extraordinary, that, in the present enlightened days, *infidelity* and *scepticism* should be more prevalent than in times of less general information and intelligence. The following remarks, perhaps, will go far to solve the paradox: —

The Christian faith has triumphed, in various ways, over the open opposition of its avowed enemies; and the ambushed attacks of its secret foes. Erudition and genius have ranged themselves under

Having thus the word of ETERNAL TRUTH, for the *foundation* of my reason-

its banner ; research and argument have laboured successfully in its cause ; all the proofs that candour can require, have been brought forwards in its support ; and, after the siftings of ages, the shocks of repeated controversies, and the buffettings of infidelity, under every possible form, its truth rests upon a basis, that may indeed be assaulted, but which never can be shaken, — **MORAL DEMONSTRATION**. Sufficient, however, as the evidences of its verity may be, for the purpose of conviction ; yet, sorrowful experience tells us, that in too many instances, they fail to produce this salutary effect. Scepticism, instead of contracting, seems to extend, its limits ; and the gifts of intellect, and the acquirements of literature, so far from conducting the minds which they adorn, into the path of religious belief, appear, too frequently, in modern times, to delude rather than enlighten, and to lead to error instead of truth. The paradox may be solved, however, by

ings on the nature and attributes of Man : I come to the following CONCLUSIONS on the important topic : —

this simple observation,— that unless a correct *moral taste* be associated with mental superiority, it is not possible, that the evidences of Christianity should operate their natural effect upon the mind. The soil must be adapted to the seed, or the harvest will be unproductive. There must be a *bias* in the heart, towards that which is morally beautiful, “ true, and just, and of good report; ” before the man can even feel an inclination to enquire into the nature of religious obligation ; much less to search after those grounds, upon which such obligation is founded. Against such a bias, the natural passions of men ; the modes of modern education ; the habits of life ; and the opinions and pursuits of society, in the present day, are all in opposition : so that it is not a just occasion of surprise, that scepticism should be more prevalent with *us* than with our forefathers ;

I HOLD, with the Scriptures, that the rational Being consists of two parts — a BODY and a SOUL — a physical frame, adapted to the uses and purposes of his temporal existence — and a *spiritual* in-

or' that, as we have made advances in refinement we should have lost ground in faith. In minds, indeed, where these seductions to infidelity are counteracted by a *correct moral taste*, the reign of scepticism, if it have obtained an influence there, will be but short. The love of purity and virtue will produce favourable opinions of *that* system of which these principles are the essence ; its pretensions to truth will be investigated with care, because the enquirer will not *fear* to find it *true* ; its evidences will be impartially weighed ; its arguments fairly appreciated : and the result will be, — objections overthrown ; doubts dispelled ; scepticism put to flight ; and Christian faith triumphant in the mind.

habitant within it: an intellectual, thinking, reasoning, perceptive principle.

I HOLD, that the *Body*, with all its wonderful mechanism, is mortal and corruptible; and, in God's appointed time, will die, and be decomposed, in the dust from which it was originally taken — but that there will not then be an *utter* change or *extinction*, of *every particle* of the corporeal frame — *non omnis moriar*. — I HOLD, that the breath of life, “breathed “by God into the nostrils of man,” at his creation — the PRINCIPLE OF VITALITY — is an imperishable principle — a monad — an infinitesimal germ, indestructible by the force or influence, of any, or all of the elements — a germ, to which *consciousness*

of *identity* is intimately attached; and by means of which, a conviction of *actual personal sameness* will be secured to the individual, when he is “changed:” when his former corruptible body shall “have “put on incorruption:” and when his external frame shall have become all but *totally* different, from the senseless “tabernacle of clay,” which was deposited in the grave.*

* Paley appears to have entertained a similar opinion. See the “Conclusion” of his “Natural Theology.” The hypothesis, at all events, is not unscriptural; and whether well-founded or fallacious, we may satisfy our minds on this subject with the pious observations, in which the above named admirable divine, finishes his admirable work:—“Upon the whole, in every thing which “respects this awful, but, as we trust, glorious

I HOLD, that the SOUL is immaterial and immortal: embracing all the attributes of intellect and mind: the seat, of every passion and every emotion; of all the impulses to virtue; and all the propensities to vice: and that, when separated from the

“ change, we have a wise and powerful Being, (the
“ author, in nature, of infinitely various expedients,
“ for infinitely various ends,) upon whom to rely
“ for the choice and appointment of means, ade-
“ quate to the execution of any plan which his
“ goodness or his justice may have formed, for the
“ moral and accountable part of his terrestrial
“ creation. THAT GREAT OFFICE RESTS WITH
“ HIM: BE IT OURS, TO HOPE AND TO PREPARE:
“ UNDER A FIRM AND SETTLED PERSUASION, THAT,
“ LIVING AND DYING, WE ARE HIS: THAT LIFE IS
“ PASSED IN HIS CONSTANT PRESENCE, THAT
“ DEATH RESIGNS US TO HIS MERCIFUL DISPOSAL.”

body, by death, it shall "return to God
" who gave it."

I HOLD, that Man was originally created "in the image of God"—that is (according to my apprehension) as perfect as a Human Being could be formed—that he fell from "his high estate," by wilful disobedience to the divine command: and that, in consequence of his transgression, his nature, intellectual and corporeal, was, to a great extent, deteriorated and degraded: a fact which even Plato allows. Not that he was converted, by this moral lapse, into a lump of defecated evil, or Satanic malignity, as some unwisely and unscripturally teach: but, that, as his body then became subject to disease and death;

so the faculties and powers of his soul, lost their primeval harmony and balance — from that fatal moment, his passions resisted the dictates of Reason: his will disdained the controul of duty: his estimates of happiness were perverted; and his moral perception was darkened and debilitated. — But, I HOLD, that the ruins of the Fall did not involve the *entire nature* of Man. A reflection from “the image of God” still remained within him — A MORAL SENSE, inherent in his soul — that celestial FACULTY, which, even amidst all his dishonour, renders him only “a little lower than the angels” — that mental PRINCIPLE, which invests him with a perception of the difference between right and wrong — that internal ATTRIBUTE, which moves him, in-

stinctively, and instantaneously, to approve or disapprove of MORAL ACTIONS, according to their different complexions: to respect Virtue, though he do not practise it; and to see the deformity of Vice, at the moment when he hugs it to his embrace.

Such, my dear Sir, is my THEORY of the origin and nature of the MORAL SENSE. By others it may be deemed fanciful or inconclusive: but, to myself, it affords complete satisfaction; being derived (as I have already said) from a source, which I regard as the fountain "of all Truth" — the WORD of GOD.

To the Sun of REVELATION alone, my mind, when perplexed, or dismayed, by the

MORAL PHENOMENA, within and around me, directs its anxious gaze, for light to unravel their intricacies, and explain their difficulties. To its "waters of comfort," my spirit repairs, under every painful doubt and troubled feeling, to drink of their peace-inspiring stream, and "find rest unto my Soul."

I am,

My dear Sir, &c. &c.

R. W.

P.S. Your animated metrical exposition of your Theory, I read with considerable pleasure. It reminded me of the celebrated Poem of Lucretius: having all its beauty, but without its poison. You will think me rash, perhaps, (for I cannot say with

Menalcas, *et me Phœbus amat*) in offering you a *poetical return*: the brazen armour of DIOMED, in exchange for the Golden Panoply of GLAUCUS: but, as the following lines are an amplification of the idea, with which I closed my letter, I beg to present them to you; in the full assurance, that, as you are too honest to applaud, where praise is not deserved; so you are too benevolent to criticize severely, where, on the writer's part, there is no pretension.

THE HAVEN OF REST.

Whither, ah whither shall the panting soul,
Wearied and wounded by the ills of life,
Direct its languid flight, for rest and peace?
Say — shall it fondly seek the roseate bowers
Of *guilty joy*; and plume its ruffled wing,
Mid riot, revelry, and senseless mirth?

Ah ! no — *there* lurks the haggard Fiend
Of dull satiety, and sour disgust :
Of all that mars, degrades, and sinks the Soul.

Shall it AMBITION's dizzy heights ascend,
And seize the empty honours of the great :
The transient breath of popular applause ;
The Robe of splendour, and the Rod of Rule ? —
— No ! cares unceasing close the mighty round ;
The heart disquieted, and head perplex'd.

Shall it ten thousand thousand fathoms sink
Down to the ATHEIST's horrible abode ;
A gloomy, fatherless, forsaken world,
Without Creator, Providence, or God ? —
“ Clouds and thick darkness ” veil the Atheist
here ;

And “ deep damnation ” seals his future doom !
“ Yes ! ye ILLUSTRIOUS CHARACTERS who cleave
“ To Idols false as these : pursue your course :
“ Riot and revel, while the pulse beats high,
“ And bids ye scorn whate'er is great or good !
“ Still *dream* that human life is ‘ all in all : ’
“ That this poor World, on which ye madly doat,

“ Is Man’s first, last, and sole inheritance !
“ Dream on, I say, till Death — and then awake,
“ To grief, remorse, distraction, and despair :
“ To quenchless flames, and ‘ worm that never
“ dies ! ’ ”

Mark the thoughtless youth, who presses
Rashly on to Pleasure’s shrine :
Wreath’d with roses are his tresses ;
Flush’d his cheek, with madd’ning wine !

Insolence, and proud o’er-bearing,
Crest his brow, and fire his eye ;
And nought regarding, nothing fearing,
He recks not *what it is to die !* —

— See him now, by Fate o’ertaken,
Stretch’d upon the bed of Death !
Every limb with anguish shaken :
Fluttering pulse, and failing breath !

Horror-stricken ; wild ; despairing ;
Agoniz’d he rolls his eyes !
And, while Guilt his soul is scaring,
Piercing shrieks ! and hopeless dies !

But, must the soul of Man, for ever toss'd
On Disappointment's waves, seek *rest* in vain ?
Is there no Refuge from the pelting storm ?
No verdant spot, on which th' exhausted Dove,
Sent from the Ark, may rest her flagging wing ?
Is there no " balm in Gilead," for the heart
Ulcer'd with life's afflictions ? — deeply pierc'd
By the sharp arrows of Man's hate or scorn :
Or, by the sharper barbs of wrath divine,
When God, his countenance of light withdraws,
And leaves the soul deserted and aghast ? —

Yes ! fellow-wand'lers through this vale of tears,
There *is* a friendly port; a healing Balm ;
A kind Physician; an eternal cure —

The Everlasting Intercessor sits
In Majesty, at God's right hand, and cries :
" Come unto ~~me~~, all ye who weary are,
" And heavy laden with the galling chain
" Of Sin or Misery — come to ~~me~~, and take,
" With bow'd and contrite heart, my easy yoke ;
" And find ETERNAL REST unto your souls ! " *

* The thoughts expressed in the above lines, formed the conclusion of a Sermon, which I

preached at St. James's Church, Bath, several years ago. A friend of mine (a celebrated musical *Improvisatore*) happened to be present at the delivery of the discourse. It chanced to please him: and he requested me to throw the per-oration into metre. I complied: and was rewarded by the most delightful *extemporaneous harmony* I had ever heard. The same unrivalled musical Genius, requested me to give him "a Dialogue between a "TRUMPET, and a CHURCH-BELL," for his *impromptu execution* on the Piano Forte. The following lines originated in a wish to oblige him:—

TRUMPET.

When the furious battle rages
On Bellona's crimson'd field:
Crested chief with chief engages;
Heroes press, and cravens yield:

I : the warrior's bosom firing,
Pour my animating breath;
Ev'ry lofty mood inspiring,
Thirst of Fame: and Scorn of Death.

Partner of the Victor's glory,
Sharing his unfading Bays :
I shall live in future story,
And still emulate his praise !

CHURCH-BELL.

A day, decreed by God, must quickly come,
Blasting the glory and the pride of man ;
When all that live shall sink into the tomb ;
And slave and victor end where they began !

But, mark — thou pamperer of pomp and state,
(Fitted alone in camps and courts to shine),
The diff'rent destinies that *then* await
Thy vain, misguided Votaries, and mine !

THEY, who inspir'd by THEE, have bent their gaze,
On worldly triumph, splendour, and renown,
Can never hope to join " the Song of Praise "
Hymn'd by blest spirits round th' ETERNAL

THRONE :

While THEY, who, rous'd by my awak'ning knell,
Their souls to Penitence and Pray'r have given,
'Scap'd from the dismal penalties of Hell,
Shall dwell for ever, " THE ELECT " in Heaven.
Hallelujah ! Amen !

LETTER II.

ON THE DECAY AND LOSS OF THE INTELLECT.

“ THEY shall perish : but thou remainest.”

Heb. i. 11.



LETTER II.

ON THE DECAY AND LOSS OF THE INTELLECT.

To S—— F——, Jun. Esq.

My dear young friend,

It is the judicious admonition of an acute Metaphysician of the last century, who made his great reasoning powers subservient to the holy cause of religion and virtue, that we should be “as cautious in “doubting, as in dogmatizing; since it is “easy to hoist our sails, but uncertain “whither the winds and waves will carry “us.” The history of scepticism, from the

most ancient times, to modern days, confirms this short representation of the *danger* of its indulgence. Hence have sprung the Atoms of EPICURUS; the Matter and Gravity of STRATO; the eternal and necessary Vicissitudes of Things of ARISTOTLE; the inconsistencies between the academical and the philosophical opinions of CICERO; and the wild and pernicious fancies of HOBBS, DESCARTES, and an hundred other later philosophers (as they are called), who have exemplified the absurd and fatal consequences of surrendering up their minds to the influence of *doubt*: men,

“ Who give the reins to wandering thought,
“ Regardless of God’s glory’s diminution;
“ ‘Till, by their own perplexities involved,
“ They ravel more, still less resolved,
“ But never find self-satisfying solution.”

The *danger*, however, of this habit is not greater than the *uneasiness* which it produces. Even in matters of a trifling import, uncertainty is always attended with agitation; and so painful is the state of mind which it occasions, that the presence of real evil is generally desired, in preference to a continuance of suspense. In concerns of greater magnitude the distress of incertitude is proportionably augmented; nor, perhaps, can any state of mind be imagined more distant from tranquillity and peace, than that which a thinking man experiences, when the truths of Religion, or the ways of Providence, have become the subjects of his *doubts*.

If these remarks be correct, (and I think

they are sanctioned by what we read, and see, and know, of the nature of the human mind,) it follows, that it is our *wisdom*, as well as our duty, to check every inclination or approach to *scepticism* — and, more especially in religion and morals, to seize upon *realities*, rather than wander after phantoms ; and to embrace the *truths* which have been revealed to us, instead of indulging in “vain reasonings,” that can never result in conclusions satisfactory to the mind.

“Down reason, then, at least *vain reasonings*, down.”

Another reason, indeed, might be alleged against encouraging the *habit of doubting* ; a reason which COWPER has touched upon, with his usual good sense.

“ It is an evil incident to man,
“ And of the worst, that unexplor’d he leaves
“ Truths useful, and attainable with ease,
“ To search forbidden deeps, where myst’ry lies
“ Not to be solved, and useless if it might.”

The truth is, that every thing which is *practical*, both in morals and religion; every thing that can make man as wise and happy as his nature and state here below will allow him to be, lies upon the *surface*, and may be discovered and attained without much labour or investigation; while, on the other hand, those doubts which his restless imagination first creates, and then fatigues itself in pursuing, are as barren as unsubstantial; they have nothing to do with the real business, or proper conduct, of life; nor, if solved, could they

be applied to his improvement *here*, or forward, in the slightest degree, his felicity *hereafter*.

I have been led, my dear Sir, into the above reflections by your last obliging letter, which, acceptable as it was on other accounts, occasioned me no small share of uneasiness, from the observations it contained on the subject of your friend's unexpected visitation ; or rather, on account of the *inferences* which you draw from the sudden failure of his mental powers ; the eclipse (probably for life) of those high talents, which have hitherto astonished, or delighted, those who have associated with him. That this event, and others of a like nature, will not justify such inferences,

would, I think, admit of the most satisfactory *proof*; since it might easily be shewn, that they are entirely consistent with the present nature and future destination of man, as deducible by reason, and revealed in Scripture: and grounded on final causes, equally wise, just, and benevolent. A slight attempt at such a *proof*, will form the subject of my present letter; and that I may proceed as fairly as possible in the argument, I shall first repeat your own reasonings, and then advance such as occur to my mind, as forming a compleat refutation of them.

“ What melancholy and humiliating
“ views of human nature,” you exclaim,
“ does such an incident suggest to us ! and

“ how inconsistent is a dispensation so
“ distressing and inexplicable, with the
“ received notions of the divine benefi-
“ cence; of an infinitely wise and just
“ Providence regulating the affairs of the
“ world; and of a renewed state of exist-
“ ence after this life! Here, we see the
“ highest privilege, the noblest possession
“ of man, the great characteristic which
“ distinguishes him from the brute; be-
“ coming the sport of chance, the victim
“ of accident, or the prey of disease. The
“ only principle in his nature which bids
“ fair for immortality, is equally perish-
“ able, we find, with his bodily machinery;
“ and either, like the expiring lamp, fades
“ away with gradual decay; or, as the
“ vigorous tree, beneath the stroke of the

“ axe, is cut off by sudden destruction.
“ When his *mind*, with toil and labour, is
“ become, as it were, a temple of universal
“ knowledge ; decorated with all the trea-
“ sures of the Arts ; and illuminated by all
“ the truths of Science ; and solid, firm,
“ and vast, promises to last for ever — the
“ sentence of ruin is unexpectedly pro-
“ nounced and executed upon it — it is
“ reduced to desolation, and plunged in
“ darkness — all its ornaments are de-
“ stroyed, and all its light extinguished.
“ What inference, then, my dear Sir, can
“ we draw from these inexplicable pheno-
“ mena but this, — that the *mind* is subject
“ to the same laws as the perishable *body* ?
“ that it is equally material and evanescent
“ with it ? and that, spite of the expect-

“ ations which are held out to us by others,
“ or the hopes we would willingly indulge
“ in ourselves, to the contrary, the *thinking*
“ principle of our constitution is, like our
“ grosser corporeal organs, meant merely
“ to serve the purposes of this life, and
“ then to be no more?”

I might, my dear Sir, were I inclined, answer the difficulties you have proposed, by an argument drawn from the *ignorance* of man ; of an ignorance too apparent to be lost sight of, notwithstanding the high character you have pourtrayed of his pre-eminent *knowledge* ; and might say with the poet,

“ He who this vast immensity can pierce,
“ See worlds on worlds compose one universe ;

“ Observe how system into system runs,
“ What other planets circle other suns;
“ What vary’d being peoples every star;
“ May tell why Heav’n has made us as we are :”

POPE.

but I would wish to untie, and not to cut the Gordian knot ; and prefer convincing by reason, rather than crushing by authority.

You must allow me, then, to observe, in the first place, that, neither the difficulties you have started, nor the conclusion you have grounded upon them, of the mind *not* having an existence independently of the body — are of modern date. They may claim an antiquity at least as high as EPICURUS ; since both are to be found in the

works of that strange mixture of genius and absurdity, his disciple, **LUCRETIUS**:

“ *Præterea, gigni pariter cum corpore; et una*
“ *Crescere sentimus; pariterque senescere men-*
tem *,” &c.

Besides, 'tis plain, that *souls* are born and grow,
" And all by age decay, as *bodies* do.
" To prove this truth ; in *infants*, minds appear
" Infirm and tender, as their bodies are ;
" In *men*, the mind is strong ; when age prevails,
" And the quick vigour of each member fails,
" The *mind's* *pow'rs* too decrease, and waste space,
" And grave and reverend *folly* takes the place ;
" 'Tis likely, then, the *soul* and *mind* must die ;
" Like smoke in air its scatter'd atoms fly :
" Since all these proofs have shewn, these reasons
told,
" 'Tis with the *body* born, grows *strong*, and *old*."

CREECH.

* Lib. iii. v. 446.

I am sorry to thrust you into “the stye
“ of EPICURUS,” or to consider you for a
moment as the pupil of such a master ; but
the fact is, that your doubts lead inevitably
to his conclusions ; and, pursued to their
extent, cannot result in any thing short of
Atheism. If, for instance, mind and body
be only different modifications of the same
substance ; if they be equally material ;
subject to the same laws of increase, decay,
and final destruction ; we have then, no
grounds for that expectation of a future
existence in a state of consciousness, which
even *reason* authorises us to entertain —
and *without* such an expectation, human
life becomes such a tissue of inconsisten-
cies ; and the world on which it is passed,
such a theatre of contradictions ; as must

compel us to believe, that neither of them could be the work of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness ; and, consequently, that God and Providence must be fanciful notions, rather than holy realities ; that the universe must have sprung from chance ; and will roll on, without law or order, meaning or design, to all eternity.

To correct such monstrous ideas, however, and to rid the mind of every difficulty, with regard to the subject immediately before us, it is only necessary, I apprehend, to establish these three truths : — First, that *body* and *soul* (for I would adopt this, rather than any other term,) are, in their natures, essentially distinct from each other : — Secondly, that the knowledge we ac-

quire here below (independently of the moral and religious truths imparted by revelation) has, probably, little, or no analogy to that which we shall possess hereafter, and, consequently, that its annihilation does not involve the idea of any *injustice* done to the being deprived of it: — And, thirdly, that the *final cause* of the decay or extinction of intellect, is so important and salutary, as to render such a dispensation a striking proof of wisdom and benevolence; and, therefore, that it corroborates, rather than weakens, the belief of an infinitely wise and good Creator and Governor of the world.

The existence of *spirit*, separate from, and independent of, *matter*; and their

essential difference from each other; have been proved so demonstrably, (as far as such subjects are capable of demonstration,) that it appears to be scarcely necessary, to adduce another argument, in favour of these propositions; and that *mind* or *intellect* — the perceptive, thinking, reasoning faculty, or, in a word, the *soul*, in man — is of the nature of spirit, seems to me to have been determined with equal certainty. All that we can conceive or reason of the *material* principle, of which our bodies are composed, resolves itself into this conclusion, — that it is a *negative* one; a solid, extended, and compounded substance, without sensation, feeling, or life; and requiring the agency of some other principle, different from, and

independent of, itself, to endue it with motion, and inspire it with the power of exhibiting those phenomena which it displays. On the other hand, of the *soul* it is predicated, with the same stamp of truth, that it is a simple and uncompounded substance; always percipient and active: endued with spontaneity both of motion and thought; and, consequently, the sole proximate cause, not only of all bodily action, but also of every mental operation. These premises being granted, it follows, of course, that the *material* frame, and its *spiritual* inhabitant, are essentially and totally distinct from each other; and must, of necessity, be governed by laws as radically different — that the *former*, being a substance consisting of parts, *must* be liable

“ light compact,” and only requires to be brought into day, and relieved from its covering, in order to display its inherent and characteristic brilliancy. Such, my dear Sir, according to my idea, is the *soul* ; the immaterial, thinking, reasoning faculty within us ; the principle which constitutes *mind* ; and without which, intellect, genius, and talent, could have no existence. Always perceptive, and always active, its own operations, within the dark and secret retreat which it occupies, can never for an instant be suspended ; but, at the same time, being deposited in a material frame, the *visible* evidence of these operations, must depend upon a certain fitness of the parts of this frame for its manifestation. As long as it continues in the body, its percep-

tions can only be received through bodily organs, and will of course be modified by the perfection or deficiency of such organs; and, what is more, its *reflective* operations, and ideal combinations, being formed from the perceptions of sensation, they also will partake of the same character of excellence or deterioration, derived from the same *material cause*.

Hence, you perceive, that the *decay or loss of intellect*, is entirely consistent with the notion of the unfading vigour and immortal youth of the *soul*; and, consequently, affords no objection against the belief of man's future existence in a state of consciousness. Indeed, the view before us, confirms the verity of this important

and delightful Christian doctrine; and at the same time vindicates the impartiality of God's dealings with his rational creatures; and, consequently, establishes the truth of an infinitely wise and just Providence regulating the affairs of mankind. It at once brings us all upon an equality with respect to the most important point, — the immaterial and everlasting part of our nature. The soul of the infant, which dies before its organs of sense are matured; and of the aged man, who survives their proper exercise; the soul of him, whose imperfect bodily conformation has rendered his mind an apparent blank from the birth; and of him, whose fine and delicate organization, has produced that quickness and vividness of perception, on

which superior intellect is founded ; the soul of the idiot, the madman, and the second child ; of those characterised by the most lofty talent, or grossest fatuity, are all equally excellent in their nature and capacity ; and though dependent upon accidental circumstances for their development *here*, will all shine (if they have been unstained by habitual, unrepented *guilt*, or adorned with their *appropriate degrees of virtue*,) with the same lustre *hereafter*.

Regarding the subject in this light, therefore, the dispensation which prostrates exalted genius, and lays the accomplished mind in ruins, cannot be considered either as an *extraordinary* or an *unjust* one.

It is not *extraordinary*, because the *bodily organs*, which are the windows of the soul : and the *sensorium*, which is the tablet whereon her reflections and combinations are delineated ; are *material, perishable, and temporary* ; and, consequently, when they fail, or are obliterated, (to which, from their very nature, they are, sooner or later, liable,) the soul, deprived of her instruments of *perceptive agency*, must, necessarily, to human apprehension, appear to be impaired, enfeebled, or extinguished. — It is not *unjust*, because the dispensation *certainly* involves no eventual, and *probably* no present, injury to the object of it ; for, if the soul be *immortal*, its obscuration *now*, compared with its effulgence hereafter, is as nothing. The differ-

ence between the present and future state is so immense; that what occurs in time, cannot be mentioned in comparison with that which is to fill eternity. A single drop to the world of waters; a scarcely perceptible atom to the boundless universe; are not so disproportioned to each other, as the life that now is, to that which is to come.

But I have said, that the decay or loss of intellect, *probably* involves in it no *present* injury, to the subject of such a visitation: by which I mean, that his personal happiness is not materially interfered with, in consequence of it. The position, I am aware, is in direct defiance of popular notions, but it may not, on that account,

be the less true ; since, general opinion is too often only another name for general error. The fact is, we are all apt to determine what happiness really is, by *our own* notions of it ; and to measure the degree of it enjoyed by, or denied to, others, by their possessing, or being deprived of, those particulars which constitute, according to our own ideas, the maximum of well being. Upon this prejudice it is, that the affluent are generally regarded by the needy as the only favourites of Heaven ; while, on the other hand, he whose idol is money, estimates the happiness of those around him, by the length of their rent-rolls, or the quantity of their stock ; and the man of talent and

erudition looks down with pity or contempt, on the dull and ignorant peasant,

“ Whose soul proud science never taught to stray,
“ Far as the solar walk, or milky way,”

as on one, whose mind is as barren of enjoyment, as it is of information. The same principle regulates our judgment with respect to the insane, the idiotic, and the fatuous. We see them deficient in, or deprived of, those mental powers, the possession of which forms the chief part of our own happiness; and therefore infer, that the desertion of *these*, has left them totally destitute of the *other*. But, such a conclusion is false in reasoning, and, I verily believe, erroneous in fact.

It is false in reasoning — because we cannot possibly be proper judges of what others may suffer or enjoy, unless we ourselves be placed in *precisely similar circumstances* with them. Indeed, were we to apply the same mode of estimating the existence, and the quantum of *pleasurable sensation*, to the lowest orders of animated being, we should immediately perceive its fallacy; since no man would be so absurd as to assert, because a *limpet* or an *oyster* has not, like himself, the faculties of reasoning and locomotion, that therefore it has no capacity of enjoyment bestowed upon it. If indeed it were *possible*, that, on the decay or loss of intellect, the man should retain the same *perceptions* and *associations* which he had possessed in a state of sanity — *then*, the privation of past

sources of enjoyment, and the consequent comparison of what he *was* with what he *is*, would, indisputably, render his situation, a condition of pure, unmixed, and positive misery. But, since his misfortune implies a *change* of these *perceptions*, and a *destruction* of these *associations*; it is probable, with respect to the *former*, that he becomes the subject of a new class, which have their appropriate pleasure attached to them: and it is certain, in regard to the *latter*, that if he gain nothing in lieu of them, he is at least unconscious of losing any thing by their annihilation.

The *fact* also, seems perfectly to agree with this reasoning. Dr. JOHNSON, it is true, has somewhere asserted, that the

state of mind in those who are deprived of reason, must necessarily be an unhappy one, since such persons are always either malignant or mischievous; a sufficient proof that they are constantly under the influence of emotions of a painful nature. But, though this remark wear the appearance of much sagacity and truth; it seems, notwithstanding, to have been generated by the gloomy fancy of the moralist, rather than founded on the calm observation and extensive experience of the practical philosopher. The usual vivacity of the insane man, and the almost perpetual, though vacant smile of him who is reduced to fatuity, seem to warrant a contrary conclusion; and however distressing they may be to those who possess, and there-

fore can appreciate, the value of their mental powers; they still indicate, that Providence, always impartial and benevolent, gives something in exchange for that which it has thought proper to take away; and grants another capacity of enjoyment, for the one withdrawn — humbler indeed in its nature; but sufficient for him, who has no consciousness that he ever possessed a more exalted one. Mrs. MONTAGUE, who viewed the evils of mortality with a more cheerful eye than the author above mentioned, in one of her letters to Dr. BEATTIE, has advanced an assertion directly the reverse of JOHNSON's; and connected an inference with it, which ought to lessen that extreme horror, with which we are so apt to contemplate the derelic-

tion of reason in others ; and which, if too much indulged, may at length become a predisposing cause, in reducing ourselves to a similar situation. "Mad people," says she, "are *certainly not unhappy* ; and "the days of human life that are passed "in this state, without sorrow, and without sin, are neither to be lamented while "passing, nor regretted when past." The truth is, that, after all, human happiness is a *negative* rather than a *positive* thing ; and he may be said to taste the greatest share of it, whose peace of mind is least broken in upon, by outward vexations, or internal storms. Now, sanity of mind (whatever the degree of talent may be that accompanies it) implies a *sense* — of the difference between right and wrong — of an *obligation*

to follow the one, and avoid the other — and of a *responsibility* attached to the non-performance of duty — and as human conduct is marked more by error and vice, than by reason and virtue, it will follow, that, where a conviction of these defects and their consequences exists, there must be *less* of *happiness*, than in cases where there is no consciousness, either of crime or responsibility. If the poet's decision,

“ Since ignorance is bliss,
“ 'Tis folly to be wise,”

may be regarded as a true axiom, then, that state, most assuredly, ought not to be considered as an unhappy one, which at once cuts off the most fertile spring of mental uneasiness, by precluding the

knowledge of demerit, and the painful forebodings of the penalties by which it must be followed,

In order to prove, however, more satisfactorily, that the privation of intellect, in a partial or total degree, does not involve the idea of any *injustice* towards the subject of such a visitation; and is entirely consistent with the *moral government* of an infinitely wise and benevolent Providence; it may be desirable to consider, that the treasures which the mind accumulates here below (independently of the knowledge derived from Revelation), can have no *analogy* to those which will be its portion in a state of future blessedness; and, therefore, that their abstraction cannot be

considered as a loss of any eventual importance to man, when he is viewed in the light of an *immortal being*, destined to survive the cessation of time, and the ruin of matter.

The very limited acquirements of the mind, after all its ardour and effort in the pursuit of knowledge, are but too faithfully described in the harmonious lines of the poet: —

“ Trace science then, with modesty thy guide ;
“ First strip off all her equipage of pride ;
“ Deduct but what is vanity or dress ;
“ Or learning’s luxury, or idleness ;
“ Or tricks to show the stretch of human brain,
“ Mere curious pleasure, or ingenuous pain ;
“ Expunge the whole, or lop th’ excrecent parts,
“ Of all, our vices have created arts ;
“ Then see how little the remaining sum,
“ Which serv’d the past, and must the time to come.”

It has been the complaint, indeed, from the earliest times, of those who have made the greatest progress in mere human wisdom, that they have advanced but a little way; and one of the most acute and profound thinkers of antiquity has honestly confessed, that every additional step which he made in knowledge, only served to give him a clearer view of his own ignorance. Nay, what is more, we have it upon record, from one who was well able to appreciate both the extent and value of intellectual attainments, that small as their aggregate actually is, the possession of that little, by no means contributes to the happiness of its possessor; “for,” says SOLOMON, “in much wisdom there is much grief; and “he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth

“sorrow.” But, even allowing, that mental superiority, and mere human acquirements, were greater in the degree and more gratifying in the enjoyment, than experience actually proves them to be; yet, their value would be reduced to an absolute trifle, when regarded with a reference to the immortal destination of man; since, they must necessarily be parted with for ever, on this side the grave, and, from their nature, can never accompany him into a *spiritual* state of being. All the attainments, and all the powers which distinguish the most humble from the loftiest mind; — the results of scientific research and the deepest knowledge of the arts; the combinations of genius, and the creations of fancy; derived, as they originally are,

through the medium of the *senses*, and depending, as they entirely do, on the more or less perfect and delicate conformation and condition of the *material* part of our frame; partake of the nature of *matter*, the fountain from which they spring, and the channel through which they flow. The whole mass, indeed, of what may be called *human knowledge*, (that is, of those objects and facts, respecting which the mind has clear, perfect, and satisfactory perceptions,) is limited to the evidence of the *senses*; and even the purest branch of it, *geometrical and mathematical truth*, rests ultimately on *material* ideas; on forms and qualities, suggested by impressions made on the organs of sensation. The moment we dismiss these palpable guides to what is real and true, we get

within the confines of *uncertainty*. The regions of abstraction may be delightful, but they are a land of shadows; filled by forms without substance, and appearances destitute of actual existence. The honest, though humiliating fact is, that, laying aside those truths which are revealed to us by God in his own sacred word, we can have no *perfect knowledge*, here below, of any thing that lies beyond the limits of *matter*—that the mind cannot rest upon aught as *indubitable*, which is not conveyed to it, by impressions made upon the *bodily* faculties, of hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, and touching. From all this, it follows, I think, as a consequence not to be doubted, that Man, in his *spiritual* state of existence, must be destined to enjoy a species of

knowledge, utterly distinct, in its nature and objects (save that of God ; and of his own duty), from that which he can possess in his present one. The difference between *spirit* and *matter* is total ; and therefore, the objects which engage the pursuit, and form the happiness, of the two, must also be equally and essentially different. It is true, indeed, that “eye hath not seen, nor “ear heard, nor hath it entered into the “heart of man to conceive,” what those objects or enjoyments may be, which the virtuous soul is destined to follow, or experience, in that state when it shall have laid aside the incumbrance of its material senses, and assumed the incorruptible garment of a *glorified body*: but of this, I think, we may be sure, that they will be such as

shall satisfy it, that — the privation of a knowledge, limited in its bounds, and imperfect in its nature; temporary in its duration, and degenerate in its kind — ought not to have been considered as a loss of any importance; or been distorted into an argument against the justice and benevolence of that God, who has reserved for the disembodied spirit, acquirements and possessions infinitely superior to those which had been taken away; as much transcending all that it had known and tasted in time, as the empyreal heaven is exalted, “ above this dim spot called “ earth.”

Nor let it be forgotten (in the last place), that the visitation, which, either by a gra-

dual corrosion, or by a sudden shock of the brain, *appears** to reduce the well-furnished mind to nakedness, or to tumble it into ruins; is still stamped with the impress of wise and benevolent design; and points to a beautiful *final cause* of high importance and utility; thus harmonising

* I say *appears*, because, (according to the reasoning of the earlier part of this letter) the intellectual, thinking principle, the *recipient* of *sensations*, and manufacturer of *ideas*, — the soul or mind, — remains, amidst the wearing away, or shattering, of the material organ, — vigorous, unhurt, and perfect. “Instinct with life” and activity; its energy cannot be extinguished or suspended, by aught that may happen to the mechanical part of the frame, although the external *manifestation* of its operations, may be precluded (as we have before said) by the deterioration of those organs through which they are intended to be developed.

with the other proofs of the existence of a great moral Governor of the world; and justifying the ways of God to man, amid appearances the most calculated of any, to perplex, afflict, and dismay the mind.

It needs not the authority of inspiration, to imprint this truth upon our consciences, — that the besetting sin of man is PRIDE. — A little knowledge of ourselves, and a slight insight into the characters of others, will clearly convince us, that this is a vice in human nature, both radical and universal. But, though every advantage with which we are blessed, has a tendency to foster the seeds of vanity and self-conceit, thus inherent in the heart of man; yet, it is certain, that talent, genius, learning,

and other intellectual endowments and acquisitions, more generally and certainly, produce this effect, than even the possession of external gifts. They seem to be more identified with ourselves, than the things without us are ; they imply a sort of *natural superiority* in those who have them, over those who have them not. Regarding our mental powers, and intellectual attainments, as faculties originating in ourselves ; or as treasures acquired by our own exclusive and independent exertions ; they generate an arrogant opinion of *self*, and a contempt and disdain of those around us ; notions and habits, which, strengthened and confirmed by the deference generally paid, and the adoration too frequently offered, to them, swell at length into a

self-sufficiency, that would be truly ridiculous, were it not decidedly criminal. And, can we doubt the wisdom and benevolence of visitations, which are so well calculated to check these moral diseases of genius and learning; and to repress that fond admiration, which the possession of the higher gifts of the mind, and of superior erudition in others, is so apt to inspire in those who want these endowments themselves? No! they are marked by the same wise design; they stand upon the same foundation; and may be justified by the same principle, as other apparently calamitous dispensations are, which are willed by the equity and mercy of the Universal Sovereign, for the improvement of his rational creatures; — the *vicissitude*

that suddenly reduces the son of prosperity to wretchedness and ruin, to cure him of arrogance and self-dependence, and to teach others the insecurity and worthlessness of the gifts of fortune: and the *disease* which unexpectedly prostrates the vigour of the young and healthy, and destroys the charms of the beautiful; and is intended to operate as a warning to the sufferers, and those around them, that all personal advantages are perishable and precarious, and that mortal man has no foundation for “glorying in his strength.”

When

“ The tears of dotage from great MARL BRO’ flow,
“ And SWIFT expires a driv’ller and a show; ”

the picture affords a *practical lesson* to

mankind, infinitely more impressive, than all the reasonings of the philosopher, the arguments of the moralist, and the exhortations of the preacher. It is a visible display; a palpable example; of the uncertainty, and, consequently, the insignificance, of those possessions and attainments, most valuable and admirable in the foolish estimates of man; and most calculated to divest his mind of its becoming dispositions — humility, modesty, and self-diffidence; — and holds up to our notice, a living admonition, not only of the defects which we ought to avoid, but also, of the qualities we should endeavour to attain, and the objects we should sedulously pursue, — the HABITS OF VIRTUE, and the REWARDS of HEAVEN — which, liable neither to dimi-

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nution, decay, nor destruction, are, like the source from whence they proceed, imperishable, unalterable, and everlasting.

I am, my dear young Friend,

Yours, &c.

R. W.

LETTER III.

ON THE IDOLATRY OF TALENT,

UNASSOCIATED WITH RELIGION AND VIRTUE.

“ There is no remembrance of the wise, more
“ than of the fool — seeing that which now is, in
“ the days to come, shall all be forgotten.” —
Eccles. ii. 16.



LETTER III.

ON THE IDOLATRY OF TALENT, UNASSOCIATED WITH PIETY AND VIRTUE.

To the same.

My dear young Friend,
THE candour with which you received my
last letter, induces me to trouble you with
another, on a topic nearly connected with
the subject of that communication, and
suggested by the event, which led me to
give you a tedious disquisition, in the

room of a familiar epistle. Its *burden*, however, like that of my former one, must be, I fear, rather of a *corrective*, than an *accommodating* nature; and pointed against an *error*, which you, in common with other young, ardent, and enquiring minds, appear to me to labour under. To those expressions of your regret at Mr. ****'s misfortune, which arise from personal feeling, and private regard, I can have no objection. They do honour to your sensibility; and in a world like ours, where, as in Ramah of old, the "voice of lamentation" "is heard on every side," should be applauded and fostered, rather than checked or discouraged. But, when you proceed to deplore the extinction of his talents as a *public* loss, and a misfortune to *society*; I

not only hesitate to sympathize with you ; but cannot forbear expressing a doubt, also, whether you do not attribute a value to his endowments, which they could not, in justice, claim.

On looking into the changes which my *own mind* has undergone, in its growth from early to mature years ; I find, that reflection and experience have corrected many of those false estimates, which the natural warmth of youthful fancy, and an ignorance of mankind, had implanted in it ; and among the rest — that high opinion which I formerly entertained “ of the worth “ and importance of genius and learning, “ both to the individual and the commu- “ nity, though unconnected with worthy

“ principles, or exemplary conduct.” Nor, am I without hopes, that the considerations I shall suggest, may convince *you also*, that the rarest intellectual endowments, and the most extensive scholastic acquirements, are not (in themselves, and without these associates,) deserving of that admiration and deference, which are so generally paid to them; and which, in my opinion, partake both of the character and the crime of IDOLATRY.

It was, you may recollect, a judicious custom among the ancient Egyptians, to determine the real character and actual worth of those who were no more, by a formal judicial enquiry into their opinions and actions when alive; and, according to

the nature and tendency of *these*, to pronounce a sentence, either of praise or condemnation, on the deceased. To a test of this description, I would bring the *mind* of Mr. * * * *, which may now be considered as “one of the departed;” and, with a sacred regard to the impartial rule, “nought to “extenuate, nor set down aught in male,” would endeavour to form a candid estimate, whether it were such, as might fairly be said to be a blessing to himself, or a reasonable object of admiration and respect from others.

It will readily be allowed, that both nature and education had been largely liberal to him. From the one, he enjoyed that delicacy of organization, which, upon

the principle maintained in my last letter, constitutes superior acuteness and vigour of intellect ; and from the other, he possessed an unusual stock of deep, general, and diversified knowledge. His genius was of the highest order, and his learning of uncommon extent ; his wit poignant ; his humour delicate ; and his eloquence, both in composition and conversation, forcible, splendid, and exuberant. But, with all these powers and advantages, he was deficient in that particular, which alone can stamp intellectual endowments with any intrinsic value — *religious and moral principle*. His mind might be compared to a garden, rich and gay with flowers, but destitute of fruits ; a paradise, with the tree of “ the knowledge of good and evil ” ^{but} without “ the tree of life.”



Early distinguished for *talent*, the attention of Mr. ****'s instructors, had been exclusively directed to its cultivation ; and as his powers were developed, and his acquirements increased, praise and admiration kept pace with their growth ; and fostered all those foibles (inherent in our nature), vanity, pride, and self-sufficiency ; which, under such an influence, are sure to form the prominent features of the character, unless they be counteracted by their only antidote — the *religious sentiment*. Hence it happened, that, flattered into a consciousness of his superiority ; and untaught to bear “ his faculties with meekness ; ” he soon assumed the air of a dictator in literature and science. Confident in his own opinions, and despising those

of other men, he became a dogmatist in argument, and a tyrant in polemics. Brooking no contradiction, and scorning to be vanquished, he contended rather for victory than principle; and was as often found to be the champion of error, as the vindicator of what is just, and right, and true. In the mean time, this negligence of principle, gradually and naturally gave rise to *scepticism*. Losing sight of truth, in the pursuit of conquest, his opinions were ever variable and unsteady; shifting their forms, and changing their complexion, as the contest suited, or the triumph demanded; and, at length, leaving his mind unfurnished with any fixed notions of religious or moral obligation. But this was not all. In human character, there will ever

be found an intimate connection, between the *principles* and the *practice*; and where the former are lax or perverse, the other will be irregular or vicious. Nor can we deny that this was the case with Mr. * * * *; for though his conduct might not be stained with any gross or systematic deviations from the rules of virtue; yet, destitute of those nice perceptions of right, which can only arise out of the union of religious and moral principles, he made no scruple of complying with the dictates of his passions; as far, at least, as they could be justified by sophistry; or were kept in countenance by the usual practices of the world.

With this sketch of the mind and character of Mr. * * * * before us, we cannot, I

think, for a moment contend, that his high endowments ought to be regarded as having been a blessing to *himself*; nor shall we estimate them unfairly, if we pronounce that they were still less advantageous to *those around him*.

The influence of great abilities is very extensive. A man of superior talent "fills a large space in society;" and his opinions and conduct, give, in a degree, a tone to the public character. If, then, these opinions have not truth for their foundation; and this conduct be not regulated by the unchangeable rules of moral virtue; it is clear, that, as far as his sphere extends, he is an agent of *evil*, and not of *good*. He scatters the worst of poison around him; the more

dangerous, from its inviting appearance and delicious flavour ; and, instead of being the friendly beacon, blazing on high, to warn the young and unwary of the rocks and shoals that lie in their course ; he may be likened to the perfidious Syren, whose beauty only deludes to shipwreck ; and whose song is merely an invitation to destruction. To men of humble intellect and unsettled principles, his opinions are a law, and his actions an example ; and even the more enlightened, astonished by the splendour, or captivated by the charms, of his talents, feel a similar magic influence, to that attributed by Pope, to the beauty of his heroine :

“ If to her share some female errors fall,
“ Look in her face, and you’ll forget them all.”

Their judgment is dazzled and perverted ; they lose that delicate moral discrimination, which is the best security of proper feeling, and worthy action ; and learn to palliate and excuse, if not to adopt and justify, all the distortions of his mind, and all the faults of his behaviour.

That this representation has truth for its support, is proved beyond dispute, I apprehend, by the present state of society among us. None will question the influence of great abilities in the abstract ; and few will deny, that they are *now*, too frequently found, unaccompanied with pious and virtuous principles. *Fact* also justifies the assertion, that though they may want these associates ; nay, what is more, though

they be notoriously combined with infidel opinions, or flagitious morals, they are, notwithstanding, a certain passport to the *best company* (as it is called), and exact from both sexes, and from every rank, an admiration approaching to idolatry. The result of all this actually is (as it necessarily must be) a deterioration of the national character ; a public falling off from stern religious integrity, and decided moral purity ; a neutralization of principles (if I may be allowed the expression), and a laxity of conduct, which, if they do not imply a general taste for avowed impiety, or open profligacy, intimate, at least, an almost universal indifference, to the distinctions of right and wrong.

It has often been said, that no one despises learning, but he who is ignorant; or speaks lightly of talent, unless he himself be deficient in it. This observation, however, has more of the appearance, than essence, of truth; and cannot be received as a just axiom, except under very material qualifications and restrictions. The *fact*, indeed, seems to be the reverse of the assertion; since, those who have been best qualified, by the variety of their acquirements; their natural endowments; and the excellence of their principles, to judge of the intrinsic value of human learning *per se*; and to appreciate the worth of inborn abilities without the accompaniment of moral qualities, have stamped them with the character of insignificance; exposed

their narrowness and imperfection ; and declared, that *in themselves*, they are inefficient to the promotion of the improvement or happiness, present or future, both of those who possess them, and of the world at large.

“ In parts superior what advantage lies ?
“ Tell (for you can) what is it to be wise.
“ 'Tis but to know how little can be known :
“ To see all others' faults, and feel our own.”

However mortifying these remarks may be to the pride of learning, or the vanity of superior parts, their justness is capable of demonstration ; and a slight enquiry into the nature of *genius, wit, erudition, and conversational powers*, the objects of that general IDOLATRY OF TALENT, which forms a characteristical feature of the age in

which we live, will go near to convince us, THAT HE IS NOT GUILTY OF A CALUMNY AGAINST INTELLECT AND ITS ACQUISITIONS, WHO PRONOUNCES THEM TO BE VAIN AND WORTHLESS, IF UNACCOMPANIED BY RELIGIOUS AND MORAL SENTIMENT.

The history of GENIUS is a melancholy record; and teaches us, by many a mournful memorial of its dangerous tendency, and fatal consequences, that this highest intellectual gift is, *in itself*, rather to be deprecated than desired. Associated with, and directed by, religion and virtue, it may, indeed, produce a MILTON in invention, and a NEWTON in science; but without these checks upon its fervour, it blazes only to destroy. Even within the limits of our

own literary annals, how many instances do we find, of men of *mere genius*, who have ruined their own peace, and unsettled the minds of others, by giving rein to an imagination uncurbed by principle; pushing a wild fancy into improper speculations; coining pernicious systems, and broaching dangerous hypotheses; while their fortunes and respectability have diminished, in proportion to the extension of their notoriety; their minds have become a chaos of idle or fatal notions; and their conduct, an example of every shameless and degrading vice. It is obvious, indeed, that the same quickness and vividness of perception, which constitutes *genius*, must have a powerful tendency to lead its possessor astray, unless it be counteracted by somewhat more steady and

substantial than itself. The variety and rapidity of its combinations, will necessarily render his mind incapable of sober thought, and calm reflection: while the force of its impulse, will be continually hurrying him into wayward, irregular, and inconsistent action. It is unnecessary to point to the career and end of a SAVAGE, a CHATTERTON, and such like other moral meteors, who are now no more, as proofs of the veracity of these remarks; our own age will furnish us with a sufficient number of similar examples, to remove all doubt and hesitation on the subject.*

* A striking illustration of the preceding remarks, has been, for a considerable period, before the world, in the character of the late LORD BYRON; a man superlatively rich in intellectual gifts, but

Of *Wit*, as an isolated quality, we shall form but a poor opinion, if *HARTLEY*'s account of its nature, and effects upon the mind, may be considered as a just one. “They who give themselves up to it,” says he, (without the restraint of *moral* *feeling* to regulate its exercise,) “must

“poor indeed” in every quality, which could render him happy in himself, or useful to others. His talents and example may fairly be said, to have been curses, rather than blessings, to society; and, as it appears to me, it is a subject of lamentation, that the public should have been deluged with a flood of his memoirs and correspondence. His biographers would better have served society, had they forborne to have raked into the unblessed dust of his foreign tomb;

“And left him alone with his *GLORY*,”
such as it was!

“ thereby disqualify their understandings
“ for the search after truth; as by perpe-
“ tually hunting after *apparent* and *partial*
“ agreements and disagreements, while the
“ *true* nature of things affords *real* agree-
“ ments or disagreements that are perhaps
“ quite opposite, a man must, by degrees,
“ pervert all his notions of things them-
“ selves, and became unable to see them as
“ they really are.” As wit, *philosophically*
considered, has thus but a slender claim
to be respected or desired, for *itself alone*;
so regarded in a *moral* point of view, it
will not assume a more amiable appear-
ance; being ill calculated either to pro-
mote the rational happiness of its possessor,
or conciliate the esteem of others. It is
not conducive to his own reasonable hap-

piness, because it has *selfishness* for its foundation; and offers only *personal gratification* to him, in lieu of that generous enjoyment, which invites others to a participation of the feast, and receives its chief charm, from being shared by many.

It is an old observation, that the wit can never have a friend; and the reason of the fact which gives rise to the observation, is this: because the quality he cultivates, leads him to affect a superiority over the rest of mankind; and, consequently, cuts him off from that reciprocity of affection, which can exist, only among beings, who consider themselves as nearly upon a par with each other. But this is not all: mankind, more inclined to be amused than

instructed, are never backward in accumulating praise on the flashes of wit, and the scintillations of conceit. Flattered by this admiration of his talent, the *wit* spares no pains, and rejects no means, of securing and extending it. The character and reputation; the foibles and even misfortunes, of other men, are seized upon without hesitation or remorse, to give point to the *repartee*; and every tie and obligation are overlooked and disregarded, in the ambition to say a *good thing*. Thus whilst his brilliancy is admired, his malignity is detested; and men regard him in the same light as they would consider the mischievous leopard; they wonder at his spots, but dread and hate his nature.

But, granting the truth of what I have advanced, with respect to **GENIUS** and **WIT**, you will still be prepared to contend, that the claims of **LEARNING**, at least, to honour and admiration cannot be denied ; and that to assert its insufficiency as a means of happiness or edification, is equally insolent, rash, and absurd. Fact, however, I apprehend, will justify the declaration. An author, who has left us an admirable work, entitled “ *Reflections upon Learning* ;” and who, from his own high acquisitions, was fully competent to estimate its worth and importance, has so clearly pointed out the vanity, in several particulars, of *mere human literature* ; its insufficiency in more ; and its difficulties in all — as to strip the idol of much of the trappings, with which

human folly had adorned it; and reduce it to the naked wood and stone.

It is a circumstance related of Sir ROBERT WALPOLE, you may recollect, (who, when he was suffering the tortures of the gout, would while away the tedious hours in listening to his son's reading,) that he always refused to hear *history*, upon the principle, that he could find no amusement in a *tissue of falsehoods*: and a like character of *imperfection* must be allowed, I fear, to attach to every other branch of human knowledge. In *Physics*, we are conversant, it is true, with a multitude of facts; but with respect to their causes, the philosopher, for the most part, is as ignorant as the child. In *Meta-*

physics, the imagination indeed may indulge in an unlimited race; but *demonstration* is a goal to which we never arrive. A knowledge of *languages*, and an acquaintance with *books*, are by no means certain guides to real wisdom; to just reasoning; or useful action. Even *Science*, in defiance of its name, is far from being a region of substances and certainty; for we should recollect, that the sublimest effort of it upon record, the grand astronomical system of the immortal *NEWTON*, rests upon a theoretical principle, the assumed law of gravitation.

Decked, therefore, in all his ornaments, the learned man, *deficient in religious principle or moral habits*, is far from being

an object of envy or admiration, as a mere storehouse of literary information. His acquisitions and pursuits, independently of better things, have only “semblance of ‘worth, not substance;’ they may amuse and occupy, but can never ennoble or satisfy his own mind; they may delight and astonish, but they can never edify the minds of others.

To speak lightly of the **POWERS OF CONVERSATION**, (that general ticket of admission to polished society,) flattered, caressed, and adored, as they universally are, may be deemed a bold rebellion against popular opinion, and denounced as the dictate of spleen; or the still more disgusting language of envy. But *truth* is fearless; and

not to be checked in her enquiries, nor deterred from her decisions, by the voice of *prejudice*, however loud or universal it may be. In *her* estimation this splendid colloquial faculty, (as it is too generally cultivated and exercised,) is more an object of reprobation than eulogy.

“ Sacred interpreter of human thought,
“ How few respect, or use thee, as they ought!”

is an apostrophe, which will continually suggest itself, to the mind of him, who mixes much with those who are celebrated for the talent in question; and who is accustomed to estimate the value of conversation — not from its eloquence or volubility; its point or brilliancy — but, from its tendency to enlarge the sphere of

noble thought, or to increase the stock of useful knowledge; to elevate the mind, or improve the heart. When he subtracts from the pleasure which it might otherwise afford him, the drawbacks arising from the *personal vanity* of the orator — from the *arrogance* with which he delivers his facts or opinions, grounded upon the assurance of his colloquial superiority — from the *paradoxes* which he maintains, for the praise of originality — and from the *sophistries* to which he resorts, for the sake of conquest — he will find, that but little remains which his judgment can applaud; and be ready to say with the poet,

“ ‘Tis past: and all that it has left behind,
“ Is but an echo dwelling on the ear
“ Of the toy-taken fancy; and beside,
“ A void and countless hour in life’s brief day.”

CROWE.

Not that I would deny the potency, or (to speak in a higher tone of praise) the utility, of a talent for conversation, when associated with religious and moral feeling. Emanating from a good-principled and well-regulated mind, it asserts a legitimate claim to all the respect and honour it can receive, for the mingled delight and instruction which it affords ; nay, what is more, it may look beyond the meed of human admiration ; and justly expect that high reward, which awaits the *right application* of every intellectual gift, bestowed on his rational creatures, by the Author of all good. Responding only to the impulse of piety and virtue, wisdom and truth ; and exercised in improving, or innocently amusive colloquy :

“ The tongue, thus touch’d, receives a sacred cure
“ Of all that was absurd, profane, impure ;
“ Held within modest bounds, the tide of speech
“ Pursues the course that truth and nature teach ;
“ No longer labours merely to produce
“ The pomp of sound, or tinkle without use ;
“ Where’er it winds, the salutary stream,
“ Sprightly and fresh, enriches every theme ;
“ While all the happy man possess’d before,
“ The gift of nature, or the classic store,
“ Is made subservient to the grand design,
“ For which Heav’n form’d the faculty divine.”

COWPER.

The slight analysis of *talent*, under its various modifications, which I have thus attempted, may perhaps place the subject in a new point of view before you ; and lead to the conclusions, that *genius alone* has but a poor title to the popularity it enjoys ; and that *mere literary knowledge* is not

the perfection of man's mind. What, indeed, is the result of the most transcendent natural abilities, combined with all the acquirements of scholastic research, compared with *principles of piety* and *virtue*; and with *moral habits*, attained by struggles and efforts, similar to the pains of intellect in prosecuting its enquiries, and furnishing the mind with literary attainments? The one may feed the vanity of the possessor, or amuse the fancy of the less enlightened, but they can do no more; while the others dignify and advantage the individual, while they benefit and improve society.

In estimating the nature of man, we should never forget, that he is a *compound*

being; made up of physical, intellectual, and moral powers — connected with *eternity* as well as time — and, though *earth* be his present abode, that *heaven* may be his everlasting residence. To attain that dignity of character, therefore, which can properly render him satisfied with himself; or justify the admiration of others; he must give a *right application*, to all the powers with which he is endowed; and act worthy of the high relations in which he is placed. The exercise of the intellect, however powerful its energies may be, if not directed by *religious* feeling and the *moral* principle, instead of perfecting, spoils the harmony of man's nature, and stamps it with the deformity of disproportion: and the circumscription of his views and endea-

vours to this world and its concerns, without a reference to that unbounded scene of being, for which he was originally designed, and is rendered capable of mingling in hereafter; as it ought to destroy every vain notion of personal excellence in the individual; so should it withhold society, also, from offering to him that idolatrous incense of esteem and applause, which he does not deserve.

I am, my dear young friend,

Yours, &c.

R. W.

THE END.

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